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A.·. A.·. Section Two Reading Group

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Materials for the Study of

The Shaving of Shagpat

by GEORGE MEREDITH

Variant Readings
&
Early Critical Notices by George Eliot

GEORGE MEREDITH

VARIOUS READINGS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

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THE SHAVING OF SHAGPAT

PREFACE to FIRST EDITION *deleted*:

It has seemed to me that the only way to tell an Arabian Story was by imitating the style and manner of the Oriental Story-tellers. But such an attempt, whether successful or not, may read like a translation: I therefore think it better to prelude this Entertainment by an avowal that it springs from no Eastern source, and is in every respect an original Work. G. M.

December 8, 1855.

p. 14, *l.* 3. *After* 'she' *deleted*: swooned with horror and . . .

p. 14, *l.* 14. *After* 'Bagarag' *deleted*: from hands visible and unseen.

p. 15. *After* ('What says the poet?') *l.* 15 *deleted*:

'Ambition on the wing,
Sweeps honey, flower, and sting.'

Also:

p. 31, *l.* 20. *After* 'hues' *added*: it was a full globe of splendours, showing like a very kingdom of the Blest; and blessed was the eye beholding it!

p. 45, *l.* 8. *After* 'dropped' *deleted*: and she was silent.

p. 45, *l.* 10. *After* 'tongue' *deleted*: and he told her of his torment.

p. 115, *l.* 4. *Added*: as in conspiracy to amuse his master.

p. 115, *l.* 7. up to the hour of noon: *altered from* one day and one night.

p. 144. *After l.* 16 *deleted*:

And the King cried, 'What of that case? let us hear it!'
So Shibli Bagarag said:

adding: And he related . . . its origin (*l.* 33).

p. 145. *The following chapter is deleted:*

AND THIS IS THE CASE OF RUMDRUM, A READER OF PLANETS, THAT WAS A BARBER

It is told of Rumdrum, O King, that he was a barber, and a reader of planets: by day he operated on the heads of men, and at night interpreted the stars. Now Rumdrum talked and had enemies, and they were active with the King of the city where Rumdrum dwelt. The King was at war with the armies of a neighbouring nation, and the enemies of Rumdrum declared to the King that Rumdrum had an understanding with the Chiefs of those armies. So the displeasure of the King fell upon Rumdrum, and he walked with the eye of abasement, even under a cloud full of direful bolts, as is said of them that arouse the wrath of kings: and the coolness of the barber forsook him, the firmness of glance, the steadiness of hand. He was in this condition when one day the King sent for him to the palace, to exert his craft. So Rumdrum went, armed with his tackle. At the palace-gates he was greeted by the cook of the palace, the head-cook, that was his friend; and the head-cook warned Rumdrum of the doings of his enemies. And Rumdrum said, 'I have seen all this by my science and my foresight, but there is that upon the head of the King which cleareth a mystery, one concerning himself, and for his sake I will go.'

So Rumdrum went and kissed the ground of obedience before the King, and arranged his tackle, and commenced shaving the King, for this time was before the time

of Shagpat, when kings were shaved, and men; wullahy! it was a time not without its glory, and there was one art the more exercised!

Now while Rumdrum shaved the King, the King questioned him as to future occurrences, and he said, 'How is it, O Rumdrum; will mine enemies succeed in what they undertake?'

And Rumdrum gave the King an answer pleasant in expression, but unsavoury to swallow.

Now the King thought, 'This fellow is beguiling me with double meanings, and the sweet conceaieth the sour in what he says.' So while the blade of Rumdrum swept over him like a gleam across the water, he made a signal to his guard for the guard to close upon Rumdrum. As they closed upon him Rumdrum shrieked, and struggled to get back to the King, and offered the guard bribes of money, rare gifts, to let him peer once more upon the head of the King; and the King was confirmed in his suspicions of Rumdrum. So he had the bow slung about the neck of Rumdrum, and accused him of the crime of a traitor. And Rumdrum said, 'O King, there is nought like confidence in thy kind; and he that dishonoureth the barber is in turn dishonoured, seeing that it is a craft made familiar with the noblest part of man, and a craft intimate with occurrences, charged with foretellings. Now, that I may prove my words, grant me one day and one night further of life, and on the morrow let me die.'

So the King granted him a day and a night to live, and on the morrow Rumdrum handed a sealed paper to the King, and died by the tightening of the bow round his neck. Then the King opened the packet, and in it was traced the figure of a barber crowned and in the robes of a King on his throne; under it were written the words, 'Let him that marketh this figure of the barber, acknowledge his repentance!' And the King, when he had seen

that, said, 'There was wisdom in Rumdrum, and by killing him I have made him potent to shame me and insult me, he that was in life my slave, so of a surety I repent.'

The King turned to a second leaf of the packet, and there was traced a figure of the King, the barber, and the Angel of Death; and the barber was shielding the head of the King from the stroke of Azrael; under it were the words, 'Let him that marketh the figure of the King, the barber, and the Angel of Death, acknowledge the faithfulness of Rumdrum.' And the King, when he had seen that, said, 'There was faithfulness in Rumdrum, for his opportunities were many of delivering me over to the Angel of Death, yet he shielded me.'

The King turned to a third leaf of the packet, and there was traced a tomb beside a cypress; under it were the words, 'Let him that marketh this tomb beside the cypress come to it by night, and acknowledge the privilege of the dead.' So the King went by night to the tomb of the barber, and stood beside the tomb; and a voice as from the hollow of the tomb called to him for the reason of his coming. The King said, 'I come hither to learn the privilege of the dead.'

And the Voice answered, 'It is the privilege of the dead to speak truth when they speak, without fear of kings.'

The King said, 'Tell me then, am I well served, secure from traitors, beloved by my wives, my courtiers, and my people?'

And the Voice answered, 'It is the privilege of the dead to be silent when they please, without fear of kings.'

The King reflected, and his heart smote him for his conduct to the barber. He said, 'If thou be Rumdrum enclosed in this tomb, listen to my praises of him and my sorrow for his loss; he that was wise, faithful, a reader of planets; whose tongue went much, but whose heart beat

true; who has filled with remorse and regret the King's breast, his eyes with tears, his thoughts with bitterness.'

And the Voice answered, 'It is the privilege of the dead to scorn flatteries, even from the mouths of kings.'

Then the King cried aloud, 'Oh, how great is the privilege of the dead! There is no privilege like to that they possess! Strong are they! He that punisheth the innocent is but an instrument to exalt them, scourged for his pains.'

Now while the King was lost in self-abasement, the Voice said, 'Know, great King, that the restlessness of an uncompleted work is on the tomb of Rumdrum the barber, and if thou wouldst appease him, call hither one to shave thee, and lay upon his tomb the hairs of thy head.'

So the King did this, and was shaved and laid the hairs upon the tomb. Then the Voice said, 'O King, the calculations of Rumdrum were cut short, and in the tomb he cannot take them up, for no science availeth in the tomb, as is written:

> "'The thoughts of heads,
> The works of hands,
> Are severed threads
> And broken bands."

Now he calculated thy nativity, and was summing the number of thy hairs when he was torn from thee, and the thing he would have foretold is dumb; so if thou wouldst know it, set thyself to count the number of thy hairs upon this tomb diligently, counting two for the hair of forte which is the Identical. And cease not to count, for when thou holdest off from counting it is the end of thy days.'

So the King saw what he had lost in Rumdrum the barber, for he knew not the Identical, which is the hair of fortune, to count two for it; and his days were given to

the counting these hairs upon the tomb, he fearing to hold off from counting lest death should surprise him. Wah! it is an ill thing to do an injustice, which springeth from suspicion, as the poet says:

'Suspicion in the birth fail not to strangle,
Lest that its offspring thy soul's beauty mangle.'

So, the King saw what he had lost in Rumdrum the barber.

p. 149, *l.* 17. and he stepped back, yet he continued taking fatal draughts: *altered from* yet he continued immovable, taking fatal draughts.

p. 157, *l.* 5. *After* 'he' *deleted*: thought her an enchantress and . . .

p. 157, *l.* 34. *Added*: 'And now give ear to the following':—

p. 171, *l.* 3. *After* 'now' *deleted*: the poet says truly,—

'The battle of the righteous is a battle half-gain'd,
For Allah's is the cause with not a fleck of self stain'd.'

p. 231, *l.* 9. *After* 'brook' *added*: partly filled and . . .

p. 236, *l.* 11. *After* 'forward' *added*: with the three on him.

p. 239. *After* ('I try the great shave') *l.* 24 *deleted as under*:
'Tell me now what has happened in the city while we were absent from it."

Feshnavat replied, 'O Master of the Event, my son, no long story that.' Then when Shibli Bagarag had invested himself in dry robes, and all were seated on the herbage, he said:

THE RECITAL OF THE VIZIER FESHNAVAT

SURELY as a river swelleth with the rains the breath of applause puffed Shagpat, and his arrogance increased, and he was a very Nile-flood of presumption, swamping the

city, so that my Viziership made me a mark for his followers and supporters, and the King regarded him with the eye of preference. So I shivered in the shadow of neglect, waiting till thy work was done and the Sword reached, to taste the sweetness of revenge on Shagpat; patience with the plotter! Now there came on a certain day, and it was the day of the New Year, one, a merchant, into the market-place of the City where we were assembled, proclaiming a marvel, and it was a lamp, the light of which none of the people could extinguish. The merchant handed it to me, and I blew upon it, but still it burned steadfast; then the merchant held the lamp to the mouth of Shagpat, and he blew, and lo, the flame vanished! So the people extolled Shagpat, and the merchant prostrated himself, and said, 'I know by this there is holiness in thee!'

Now the merchant handed it to us again to bring back the light, and none of us could bring it back save Shagpat, and the merchant said, 'How is it I marked not at a glance that this man of the thick and lengthy growth was he that had holiness in him?' Then said he to the people, 'Honour him ye!' And he said to the King, 'O King, high in majesty, potent! if the blaze of thy throne over kingdoms and countries be now such as we see it, what would it be were Shagpat at thy right hand, advising thee in the chair of the Vizier?'

Upon that I was wroth, and sought the countenance of the King, but he betrayed no discontent; so I saw that the star of Shagpat was in the ascendant,—mine darkened by it. Now in this merchant I discovered the Genie Karaz, and daily he did things in this wise to honour Shagpat in the eyes of the people and abase me; yet was I patient and awaited thy coming, O Master of the Event, to confound him. Things were in that state when tidings were brought of a barber that had been in Oolb, and had

shaved the King and his officers with a terrible tackle that talked and prophesied shame to Shagpat, dishonour to him, and downfall, disgrace, and vindictive shearing. Then I knew thou wert in part triumphant by the aids of Noorna, my daughter, and that Paravid and Garraveen would lead to the lily, the Lily to Aklis, Aklis to the consummation of vengeance and crowning of Events on the head of Shagpat. Surely the thought was comfort, and the news intoxicated me, and I went forth disguised and without companion, when the day had sunk, to watch the effect of it on the people that stood in groups by the doorways and met on the housetops, and collected on the ways leading to the wells, discussing in alarm the case of Oolb, and the Barber, and Shagpat.

Now I was standing by the tall palm near the well Eastward of the city, when I heard a sound of one that approached in the dusk, mumbling sentences in the dialect of Shiraz, grumbling as it seemed; and I heard him say, 'A curse on this capricious King of Oolb! Shaved is he? By the tomb of my fathers, I 'll offer my skill nowhere save in Shiraz after that, and they may languish for it the length of the earth, and make offers for my service, yea, offers of pearls and precious stones and dresses and slaves, elegant damsels, instructed, sensible to eloquence. All these they may offer for an essay of my science and an exposition of my cunning on their frontispieces; yea and more, steeds they may offer and golden tackle, yea, and princes shall woo me vainly, proffering estates and mansions, with gardens and established harems for but one operation of my hand upon them, and I 'll refuse, scorning them contumeliously—I—'

While the Vizier Feshnavat was reciting this soliloquy, Shibli Bagarag burst in on his recital, crying, ''Twas—and I guess it, and wager on the guess, O Feshnavat!—Baba Mustapha!'

Said Feshnavat, 'Even he! how recognized you him?'

And Shibli Bagarag answered, 'By his loquacity, his lengthiness of tongue, his esteem of his science over all other created things.'

Then the Vizier Feshnavat said, 'O Master of the Event, truly I could have laughed while this fellow mumbled, and I should have roared with laughter, but that a thought illumined my brain and lighted a path up the intricacies of action, solving perplexity; and I rushed upon him, and seized him, exclaiming, 'In the name of Shagpat!'

So he fell on the knees of remonstrance, and lifted the hands up imploring; and I said, 'Thou art a barber! confess that thing!'

Then he stammered with what speech was his, and I commanded him imperiously to follow me, and took him before the King, and accused him in the King's chamber of audience of the crime of barbercraft, and of being the barber that had shaved the King of Oolb and the officers of his Court, and the viziers and emirs, and grave magistrates and cadis and shahids, and lesser personages of the Court and City of Oolb. So he denied this, and I continued to accuse him, the poor wretch! And his journeys were traced by Arabs from the gates of Oolb, his case a clear case of barbercraft proved upon him; and I was extolled for my zeal, praised, and in favour again, as is said by the poet:

'Nature's ordinance is sad!
Each preys on each, as 'twould appear:
Thy saneness driveth neighbours mad,
Their smiles cause thee a tear.'

This is so, and he says:

'Thro' thy good fortune will a store
That once was full decrease;
In smiles, tears, sighs, jests, evermore
We see-saw till we cease.'

And he adds:

'When one is down, the other's up;
We're brothers only in the cup.'

'Wherefore,' he says, 'drink ye, and fatten in merriment, O ye of humankind!' and this I said to Baba Mustapha when he had received plenteous thwackings, touched with pity for his state; but he refused consolation, dwelling in verse on the delights of Shiraz, the honours awarded to barbercraft there. Now, on a day, as he paced the felons' prison in a moment of dejection, I was by, and heard him call on the name of Shibli Bagarag as one absent, missing, and to whom he was indebted for divers thwackings, ignominies, and maltreatments: so I said to him, 'What of the youth Shibli Bagarag?'

And he answered, 'This of him, O Vizier: that but for him and my search after him, I were now in the centre of the adulations of Shiraz; the good-for-nothing fellow! he whom the Evil One possessed with the idea of arriving at great things,—and the readers of planets! And but for him and his wilfulness, and his wandering, and his accursed ambition and dissatisfaction with his born state, the head of the Shah, the high potentate, sovereign of the earth, that head which blindeth men, were even now a familiar thing beneath my hands, I operating on him, pouring honeyed gossip in his ear, sweet scandal, laughable anecdotes, recitations.'

Then he began to hint at what would be the wrath of the King of Persia when he came to hear of the treatment received by his chief barber at the hands of them of our city. Surely his tongue was a watermill, and wagged on all themes and subjects; and I let him relieve his soul with this prate, till he told of the relationship between ye. Thereat my conscience smote me on the rib with compassion for him, and I had him released, and con-

veyed to me secretly, and fed him, clothed him, filled him with comfort; relating to him that portion of thy adventures known to me, O Master of the Event; and of thy betrothal to my daugther Noorna, and of thy destiny that led thee through dangers, enchantments, privations, amazing marvels, to the Shaving of Shagpat. So hearing this, he gave praise to the readers of planets, and cried extemporaneously and in seemly verse:

'We mortals, that know not the stars and their doings,
Complain when annoy'd in our warrings and wooings;
But oh could we read them, their mysteries tracking,
Like birds in a storm we should sing through each thwacking.'

Wullahy! scarce could I restrain him from flying at Shagpat that instant; and it required abundance of quotation from what the sages have bequeathed to us in matters of experience and wisdom, and lively illustrations, forcible appeals, to hold him back. Now till his excitement abated I kept him by me. Then I gave him porter's work, and he did me commissions, faithfully, with zeal, and a tongue that ceased not to rattle on all but the forbidden business. So it was that, after Time, the father of changes, had flown some while without seed of circumstance, one night Baba Mustapha failed to return, and the next and that following; and I was in fear lest aught had befallen him. It was on the fourth morning that I descended early to the silver hall of my palace, and lo! suddenly one that rushed into it like a quarry seeking shelter, pale of face, and turban awry; and he rushed to the fountain and dipped his head therein, and was clearly a man that wished to certify to himself the fact of his existence in this world. Now when he looked up, I saw that it was Baba Mustapha, and that in his absence he had mixed with terrors and drunk of the waters of

tribulation. So I cried to him, 'Ho! Baba Mustapha!' but he took no heed of me, and looked with the eye of a sheep. I examined him, and there were marks upon him of fresh castigation. Then I perceived that he had fallen into the hands of the inimical, who had chased his wits from their habitations: so to revive his spirit and bring speech to his lips, I sent to the meat-market and bought a sheep whole and unsheared, remembering what is said, 'The habitations of the wits are habits'; and I had the sheep placed before Baba Mustapha, beside him tackle and soap for soaping preparatory to the shave, to tempt him to action; praise be to thy craft, O Master of the Event! For awhile he recognized not this; but presently the uses of the barber warmed in him and thawed forgetfulness; and my conception of his case and the remedy was perfect, for he seized the tackle, and commenced soaping the sheep dreamily; then with a livelier hand; then with a hand of vigour; then fiercely, fiercely; then so that his hand was like a wind, wild as a fly, swift as a wheel, invisible in motion; he crying, 'I have thee, Shagpat! I have thee!' crying, 'What! thou and thy creatures deluded me! Wullahy! this is vengeance, this!' crying, 'Even without the aid of the sword my nephew seeketh at such a risk, trouble, labour!' Then he began to shave the sheep, putting forth all his science and dexterity, vainly turning his wrist, coxcombically elevating the bend of his elbow, tenderly handling the animal while his blade swept over it. Never I wot was sheep-shearing performed with that extreme of care and skill! So when 'twas done, I watched him, and he collected the wool under one arm, and breathed a deep inflation; and he was as if too light on his feet for the earth he trod, his head menacingly challenging the remoteness of the four quarters of the universe for one equal to him in the thing he had achieved. Wah! 'twas a madness of laughter to look

upon him. Then on a sudden he cried, addressing himself proudly, 'Proclaim Shagpat shaved!' and lo! ere I could divine his purpose and arrest him, he slanted swiftly from the hall, and his heels were twinkling beyond the portals of the palace, and up the street towards the market-place. Awahy! then was I in the abysms of despair, and saw myself no match for the ills that threatened, for he was shouting of Shagpat publicly, proclaiming Shagpat shaved, and by his hand, the hand of Baba Mustapha, in the house of Feshnavat the Vizier; and that 'twas the fallen crop of Shagpat he held beneath his arm, even that, a glory of barbercraft! Truly his wits were traitors to the tender parts of him, and he was confounded ere the setting of that day's sun, confronted with Shagpat in his splendour and his gravity, and his enveloping hairiness and his umbrageous growths! Then was he thwacked by order of the King till the flesh of his back was hillocky with purple weals, and he, a moving mass of aches and stings and shooting pains and throbs of unpleasantness, thrust from the gates of the City. The matter was so with Baba Mustapha; but as for how the matter went with me, 'tis certain I was haled to the presence of the King, and denials, protestations, assertions went for nothing; the barber was tracked from my palace, and the wife of Shagpat, she that adoreth him, Kadza, this woman and another, an old woman, a veritable hag, thrice hideous, a mockery of the putting together of flesh and bones, with skin like a frog, throat like a pelican, legs like a peacock, back like a camel——

Cried Noorna bin Noorka, 'Goorelka of Oolb!'

So the Vizier Feshnavat continued: 'Tis the thing that might be! She then, this crone, swore to my plotting with Baba Mustapha, made oath to my conspiracies against Shagpat, and that I, my emissaries and I, had many times assaulted the holy man of late, tugged at

him by the beard and back-hair, offended his vision with insolent flourishings of the apparatus of barbercraft,—all this; and that upon one occasion I had forced an entrance to him in his shop-front after dusk, when the people were retiring from their observation of Shagpat, and compelled him to submit to the lather, purposing to have him shaved. They said, 'Thereat mark a wonder of special grace and protection accorded to Shagpat, and the care of him exercised by Genii, O King of this City; for the blade of the barber in its contact with the first hair broke, fell in twain, and the edge of it became blunter than a date-stone!'

The King exclaimed, ''Tis wondrous! Wullahy! We will have it announced to them of Oolb, the shorn, the self-abased, the tackle-contaminated ones; and I will have it written on tablets of virgin silver in gold letters, that time hereafter may read of Shagpat, the unparalleled, and the care of him exercised by Genii. Wullahy! he reflecteth honour on the throne itself. My Vizier is he!'

Now this false-speaking prevailed, and a day was fixed for my degradation before the people, and 'twas to be a day of exaltation for Shagpat. Dust was in the eyes of the King, wool in his ears, oblivion of long services in his heart! Methinketh likewise, O Master of the Event, that his conduct to me was seasoned with folly and small reading of that which futurity bringeth forth. I was disgraced, thwacked with the thong; Shagpat exalted, enjoying my viziership taken from me, and men made foolish—ruined by him. I was left not even in possession of the palace in which I abode. What a day was that!

Cried Shibli Bagarag, 'O Feshnavat, 'twas not a day veiled from me, and I saw it, thee, and him.'

So Feshnavat said, 'How? From what point of view, O Master of the Event?'

He answered, 'From Aklis, through the eye of Aklis.'

So Feshnavat said, 'Wondrous must be that eye!'

He replied, 'All things be wondrous in Aklis.'

This is followed by the passage beginning 'Then said he . . .' (*p.* 239, *l.* 25).

p. 240, *l.* 7. *After* 'fruit' *deleted*: diminished, weazen, bitter.

p. 241. *After* ('into a phial') *l.* 14 *deleted*:

So when they had spoken, Shibli Bagarag turned to the Vizier Feshnavat and exclaimed urgently, 'Thy service in this enterprise even to the death?'

Feshnavat replied, 'Even so far!'

p. 241, *l.* 23. *After* 'gabbler' *added*: He is there, as I guess by signs; I have had warnings of him. Discover him speedily.

p. 242, *l.* 12. *After* 'thwacking' *added*: as I have tasted it in this undertaking.

p. 242, *l.* 19. *After* 'Council' *deleted*: proclaim to the King before his officers and his court, Shagpat shaved! Terrible, I foresee, the tumult! He will menace the proclaimer; but be thou steadfast in the assertion, even as a rock in the descent of the torrent, stemming it amidst uproar and wrath and riot; yea, glue the soles of thy feet to the marble flooring, and stand singly there denouncing Shagpat, challenging the tongue of contradiction, daring the Court to prove him by demonstration other than an impostor. 'Twill then hap that the King angrily issues his mandate for the confronting of thee with Shagpat, thou being under sentence in case of calumny. Then will Shagpat appear: a time of triumph for him, an hour of glory, a vanity divine; his last';—

adding: challenge the tongue of contradiction to affirm Shagpat other than a bald-pate bewigged. This is for thee to do.'

p. 242, *l.* 22. after thought, 'And what becometh of me, O thou Master . . .': *altered from* after a pause, 'And I, O Master . . .'

p. 242, *l.* 24. *After* 'said' *deleted*: 'Thou? Is there a distance can hide from the edge of this blade,—an obstruction to impede it?'

p. 258. *After* ('man') *l.* 35 *deleted*: And 'tis an instrument.

p. 269, *l.* 16. *After* 'thee' *deleted*: now the knee again! now the neck, the nape of it!—So then—where was I? Contemplating the lather? and a fair lather is it, invented by me, and no more words concerning it or aught else, but set thyself to the task, O Baba Mustapha of happy birth! and—Achrrrr, flea, flea, flea!

p. 269, *l.* 18. *After* 'flea' *deleted*: Wah! I 'll be turned aside by nought living, nay, nor dead; for here 's Shagpat, the very centre of the sun of radiance, mine enemy and the enemy of man, beneath my thumb, dumb beneath it, and as a frozen frog and slumbering porcupine; and he 's behind two clouds, and this third will be a quenching of his beams, and a transferring of them to me that I may shame Oolb, and its King and its Court, and its—Flea of infamy! curses light on thee! and thou 'rt of a surety acting under the instigation of the Evil One, and Satan 's in thee! Begone, and release me!

p. 272, *l.* 29. *After* 'weary' *deleted*: As the poet has said:

'Give me a bath in yonder fount,
My spirit to the skies will mount,
Nor ever feel a sense of toil;
For it is like celestial oil:
Celestial oil rubb'd on the slain
Believer, from the battle plain
Caught up; by sweet white-handed Houris without stain.'

p. 274, *l.* 10. *After* 'people' *deleted*: How is it written in the advice to kings of the sage?—

'Sword of the People! fail not fiercely to chastise.
But evils have first causes; first seek where hid each lies.'

And where lies this, O people, but . . .

p. 281, *l.* 34. *After* 'nights' *deleted*: And the four Kings and the people of the City of Shagpat fasted that term, remaining where they were, beneath the hall, without speech and motion of their members, in awe of the great light and as a mark of reverence, gazing up to it with the aspect of wonderment, as the poet has said in his verse of lamentation for Shagpat:

'They gazed with eyes extended wide,
To let the soul dilate:
That miracle of barbercraft defied,
Abash'd them in their state.
And were the great
Abash'd? four Kings tongue-tied?
A people brought to fast
Three days, three nights,
Without delights,
Knowing not how long 'twould last?
Yea, and like to fish half-fried
Their eyeballs glisten'd, while the pride
Of Shagpat, from his cushion'd throne,
Awe to inspire,
Proclaim it! proclaim it!
Rose in fire,
That none might shame it;
Rose in fire,
Proclaim it! proclaim it!
Up to the zenith, and illumed the zone!'

p. 295, *l.* 11. First Edition *read*:

'Too frequently subservient to fools.'

GEORGE MEREDITH

SOME EARLY APPRECIATIONS

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III

GEORGE ELIOT

ON

THE SHAVING OF SHAGPAT

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No art of religious symbolism has a deeper root in nature than that of turning with reverence towards the East. For almost all our good things—our most precious vegetables, our noblest animals, our loveliest flowers, our arts, our religious and philosophical ideas, our very nursery tales and romances, have travelled to us from the East. In an historical as well as in a physical sense, the East is the Land of the Morning. Perhaps the simple reason of this may be, that when the Earth first began to move on her axis her Asiatic side was towards the sun—her Eastern cheek first blushed under his rays. And so this priority of sunshine, like the first move in chess, gave the East the precedence, though not the pre-eminence, in all things; just as the garden slope that fronts the morning sun yields the earliest seedlings, though those seedlings may attain a hardier and more

luxuriant growth by being transplanted. But we leave this question to wiser heads—

"Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas."

(Excuse the novelty of the quotation.) We have not carried our reader's thoughts to the East that we may discuss the reason why we owe it so many good things, but that we may introduce him to a new pleasure, due, at least indirectly, to that elder region of the earth. We mean "The Shaving of Shagpat," which is indeed an original fiction just produced in this western island, but which is so intensely Oriental in its conception and execution, that the author has done wisely to guard against the supposition of its being a translation, by prefixing the statement that it is derived from no Eastern source, but is altogether his own.

"The Shaving of Shagpat" is a work of genius, and of poetical genius. It has none of the tameness which belongs to mere imitations manufactured with servile effort, or thrown off with simious facility. It is no patchwork of borrowed incidents. Mr. Meredith has not simply imitated Arabian fictions, he has been inspired by them; he has used Oriental forms, but only as an Oriental genius would have used them who had been "to the manner born." Goëthe, when he wrote an immortal work under the inspiration of Oriental studies, very properly called it "West-östliche"—West-eastern—because it was thoroughly Western in spirit, though Eastern in its forms. But this double epithet would not give a true idea of

Mr. Meredith's work, for we do not remember that throughout our reading we were once struck by an incongruity between the thought and the form, once startled by the intrusion of the chill north into the land of the desert and the palm. Perhaps more lynx-eyed critics, and more learned Orientalists, than we, may detect discrepancies to which we are blind, but our experience will at least indicate what is likely to be the average impression. In one particular, indeed, Mr. Meredith differs widely from his models, but that difference is a high merit: it lies in the exquisite delicacy of his love incidents and love scenes. In every other characteristic—in exuberance of imagery, in picturesque wildness of incident, in significant humour, in aphoristic wisdom, "The Shaving of Shagpat" is a new Arabian Night. To two-thirds of the reading world this is sufficient recommendation.

According to Oriental custom the main story of the book—The Shaving of Shagpat—forms the setting to several minor tales, which are told, on pretexts more or less plausible, by the various *dramatis personæ*. We will not forestall the reader's pleasure by telling him who Shagpat was, or what were the wondrous adventures through which Shibli Bagarag, the wandering barber, became Master of the Event and the destroyer of illusions, by shaving from Shagpat the mysterious identical which had held men in subjection to him. There is plenty of deep meaning in the tale for those who cannot be satisfied without deep meanings, but there is no didactic thrusting forward of moral lessons, and our

imagination is never chilled by a sense of allegorical intention predominating over poetic creation. Nothing can be more vivid and concrete than the narrative and description, nothing fresher and more vigorous than the imagery. Are we reading how horsemen pursued their journey? We are told that they "flourished their lances with cries, and jerked their heels into the flanks of their steeds, and stretched forward till their beards were mixed with the tossing manes, and the dust rose after them crimson in the sun." Is it a maiden's eyes we are to see? They are "dark, under a low arch of darker lashes, like stars on the skirts of storm." Sometimes the images are exquisitely poetical, as when Bhanavar looks forth "on the stars that were above the purple heights and the *blushes of inner heaven that streamed up the sky;*" sometimes ingenious and pithy; for example, "she clenched her hands an instant with that feeling which knocketh a nail in the coffin of a desire not dead." Indeed, one of the rarest charms of the book is the constant alternation of passion and wild imaginativeness with humour and pithy, practical sense. Mr. Meredith is very happy in his imitation of the lyrical fragments which the Eastern tale-tellers weave into their narrative, either for the sake of giving emphasis to their sententiousness, or for the sake of giving a more intense utterance to passion, a loftier tone to description. We will quote a specimen of the latter kind from the story of "Bhanavar the Beautiful." This story is the brightest gem among the minor tales, and perhaps in the whole book. It

is admirably constructed and thoroughly poetic in its outline and texture.

"Bhanavar gazed on her beloved, and the bridal dew overflowed her underlids, and she loosed her hair to let it flow, part over her shoulders, part over his, and in sighs that were the measure of music she sang—

"'I thought not to love again!
But now I love as I loved not before;
I love not: I adore!
O my beloved, kiss, kiss me! waste thy kisses like a rain.
Are not thy red lips fain?
Oh, and so softly they greet!
Am I not sweet?
Sweet must I be for thee, or sweet in vain:
Sweet to thee only, my dear love!
The lamps and censers sink, but cannot cheat
Those eyes of thine that shoot above,
Trembling lustres of the dove!
A darkness drowns all lustres: still I see
Thee, my love, thee!
Thee, my glory of gold, from head to feet!
Oh, how the lids of the world close quite when our lips meet!'

"Almeryl strained her to him, and responded:—

"'My life was midnight on the mountain side;
Cold stars were on the heights:
There, in my darkness, I had lived and died,
Content with little lights.
Sudden I saw the heavens flush with a beam,
And I ascended soon,
And evermore over mankind supreme
Stood silver in the moon.'

"And he fell playfully into a new metre, singing:—

"'Who will paint my beloved
In musical word or colour?
Earth with an envy is moved:
Sea-shells and roses she brings,
Gems from the green ocean-springs,
Fruits with the fairy bloom-dews,
Feathers of Paradise hues,
Waters with jewel-bright falls,
Ore from the Genii-halls:
All in their splendour approved;
All; but, match'd with my beloved,
Darker, denser, and duller.'

"Then she kissed him for that song, and sang:—

"'Once to be beautiful was my pride,
And I blush'd in love with my own bright brow.
Once, when a wooer was by my side,
I worship'd the object that had his vow:
Different, different, different now,
Different now is my beauty to me:
Different, different, different now!
For I prize it alone because prized by thee.'

"Almeryl stretched his arm to the lattice, and drew it open, letting in the soft night wind, and the sound of the fountain and the bulbul and the beam of the stars, and versed to her in the languor of deep love:—

"'Whether we die or we live
Matters it now no more;
Life has nought further to give:
Love is its crown and its core.
Come to us either, we're rife,—
Death or life!

"'Death can take not away,
Darkness and light are the same:
We are beyond the pale ray,
Wrapt in a rosier flame;
Welcome which will to our breath,—
Life or death!'"

An example of Mr. Meredith's skill in humorous apologue is the "Punishment of Khipil the Builder," which is short enough to be quoted without much mutilation:—

"They relate that Shahpesh, the Persian, commanded the building of a palace, and Khipil was his builder. The work lingered from the first year of the reign of Shahpesh even to his fourteenth. One day Shahpesh went to the river-side, where it stood, to inspect it. Khipil was sitting on a marble slab among the stones and blocks; round him stretched lazily the masons and stonecutters and slaves of burden; and they with the curve of humorous enjoyment on their lips, for he was reciting to them adventures, interspersed with anecdotes and recitations and poetic instances, as was his wont. They were like pleased flocks whom the shepherd hath led to a pasture freshened with brooks, there to feed indolently; he, the shepherd, in the midst.

"Now the King said to him, 'O Khipil, show me my palace where it standeth, for I desire to gratify my sight with its fairness.'

"Khipil abased himself before Shahpesh, and answered, 'Tis even here, O King of the age, where thou delightest the earth with thy foot, and the ear of thy slave with sweetness. Surely a site of vantage, one that dominateth earth, air, and water, which is the builder's first and chief requisition for a noble palace, a palace to fill foreign kings and

sultans with the distraction of envy ; and it is, O Sovereign of the time, a site, this site I have chosen, to occupy the tongues of travellers and awaken the flights of poets!'

"Shahpesh smiled and said, 'The site is good! I laud the site! Likewise I laud the wisdom of Ebn Busrac, where he exclaims:—

"'Be sure, where Virtue faileth to appear,
For her a gorgeous mansion men will rear;
And day and night her praises will be heard,
Where never yet she spake a single word.'

"Then said he, 'O Khipil, my builder, there was once a farm-servant that, having neglected in the seed-time to sow, took to singing the richness of his soil when it was harvest, in proof of which he displayed the abundance of weeds that coloured the land everywhere. Discover to me now the completeness of my halls and apartments, I pray thee, O Khipil, and be the excellence of thy construction made visible to me.'

"Quoth Khipil, 'To hear is to obey.'

"He conducted Shahpesh among the unfinished saloons and imperfect courts and roofless rooms, and by half-erected obelisks, and columns pierced and chipped, of the palace of his building. And he was bewildered at the words spoken by Shahpesh; but now the King exalted him, and admired the perfection of his craft, the greatness of his labour, the speediness of his construction, his assiduity, feigning not to behold his negligence.

"Presently they went up winding balusters to a marble terrace, and the King said, 'Such is thy devotion and constancy to toil, O Khipil, that thou shalt walk before me here.'

"He then commanded Khipil to precede him, and Khipil was heightened with the honour. When Khipil had

paraded a short space he stopped quickly, and said to Shahpesh, 'Here is, as it chanceth, a gap, O King! and we can go no further this way.'

"Shahpesh said, 'All is perfect, and it is my will thou delay not to advance.'

"Khipil cried, 'The gap is wide, O mighty King, and manifest, and it is the one incomplete part of thy palace.'

"Then said Shahpesh, 'O Khipil, I see no distinction between one part and another; excellent are all parts in beauty and proportion, and there can be no part incomplete in this palace that occupieth the builder fourteen years in its building: so advance, and do my bidding.'

"Khipil yet hesitated, for the gap was of many strides, and at the bottom of the gap was a deep water, and he one that knew not the motion of swimming. But Shahpesh ordered his guard to point their arrows in the direction of Khipil, and Khipil stepped forth hurriedly, and fell into the gap, and was swallowed by the water below. When he rose the third time succour reached him, and he was drawn to land trembling, his teeth chattering.

"And Shahpesh praised him, and said, 'This is an apt contrivance for a bath, Khipil, O my builder! well conceived; one that taketh by surprise; and it shall be thy reward daily when much talking hath fatigued thee.'

"Then he bade Khipil lead him to the hall of state. And when they were there Shahpesh said, 'For a privilege, and as a mark of my approbation, I give thee permission to sit in the marble chair of yonder throne, even in my presence, O Khipil.'

"Khipil said, 'Surely, O King, the chair is not yet executed.'

"And Shahpesh exclaimed, 'If this be so, thou art but the length of thy measure on the ground, O talkative one!'

"Khipil said, 'Nay, 'tis not so, O King of splendours! blind that I am! yonder's indeed the chair.'

"And Khipil feared the King, and went to the place where the chair should be, and bent his body in a sitting posture, eyeing the King, and made pretence to sit in the chair of Shahpesh.

"Then said Shahpesh, 'As a token that I approve thy execution of the chair, thou shalt be honoured by remaining seated in it one day and one night; but move thou to the right or to the left, showing thy soul insensible of the honour done thee, transfixed shalt thou be with twenty arrows and five.'

"The King then left him with a guard of twenty-five of his body-guard; and they stood around him with bent bows, so that Khipil dared not move from his sitting posture. And the masons and the people crowded to see Khipil sitting on his master's chair, for it became rumoured about. When they beheld him sitting upon nothing, and he trembling to stir for fear of the loosening of the arrows, they laughed so that they rolled upon the floor of the hall, and the echoes of laughter were a thousandfold. Surely the arrows of the guard swayed with the laughter that shook them.

"Now, when the time had expired for his sitting in the chair, Shahpesh returned to him, and he was cramped, pitiable to see; and Shahpesh said, 'Thou hast been exalted above men, O Khipil! for that thou didst execute for thy master has been found fitting for thee.'

"Then he bade Khipil lead the way to the noble gardens of dalliance and pleasure that he had planted and contrived. And Khipil went in that state described by the poet, when we go draggingly, with remonstrating members—

"'Knowing a dreadful strength behind
And a dark fate before.'

"They came to the gardens, and behold, they were full of weeds and nettles, the fountains dry, no tree to be seen —a desert. And Shahpesh cried, 'This is indeed of admirable design, O Khipil! Feelest thou not the coolness of the fountains?—their refreshingness? Truly I am grateful to thee! And these flowers, pluck me now a handful, and tell me of their perfume.'

"Khipil plucked a handful of the nettles that were there in the place of flowers, and put his nose to them before Shahpesh till his nose was reddened; and desire to rub it waxed in him, and possessed him, and became a passion, so that he could scarce refrain from rubbing it even in the King's presence. And the King encouraged him to sniff and enjoy their fragrance, repeating the poet's words—

"'Methinks I am a lover and a child,
A little child and happy lover, both!
When by the breath of flowers I am beguiled
From sense of pain, and lull'd in odorous sloth.
So I adore them, that no mistress sweet
Seems worthier of the love that they awake:
In innocence and beauty more complete,
Was never maiden cheek in morning lake.
Oh, while I live, surround me with fresh flowers!
Oh, when I die, then bury me in their bowers!'

"And the King said, 'What sayest thou, O my builder? that is a fair quotation, applicable to thy feelings, one that expresseth them?'

"Khipil answered, ''Tis eloquent, O great King! Comprehensiveness would be its portion, but that it alludeth not to the delight of chafing.'

"Then Shahpesh laughed, and cried, 'Chafe not! it is an ill thing and a hideous! This nosegay, O Khipil, is for

thee to present to thy mistress. Truly she will receive thee well after its presentation! I will have it now sent in thy name, with word that thou followest quickly. And for thy nettled nose, surely if the whim seize thee that thou desirest its chafing, to thy neighbour is permitted what to thy hand is refused.'

"So the King set a guard upon Khipil to see that his orders were executed, and appointed a time for him to return to the gardens.

"At the hour indicated Khipil stood before Shahpesh again. He was pale, saddened; his tongue drooped like the tongue of a heavy bell, that when it soundeth giveth forth mournful sounds only: he had also the look of one battered with many beatings. So the King said, 'How of thy presentation of the flowers of thy culture, O Khipil?'

"He answered, 'Surely, O King, she received me with wrath, and I am shamed by her.'

"And the King said, 'How of my clemency in the matter of the chafing?'

"Khipil answered, 'O King of splendours! I made petition to my neighbours whom I met, accosting them civilly and with imploring, for I ached to chafe, and it was the very raging thirst of desire to chafe that was mine, devouring intensity of eagerness for solace of chafing. And they chafed me, O King; yet not in those parts which throbbed for the chafing, but in those which abhorred it.'

"Then Shahpesh smiled and said, ''Tis certain that the magnanimity of monarchs is as the rain that falleth, the sun that shineth: and in this spot it fertilizeth richness; in that encourageth rankness. So art thou but a weed, O Khipil! and my grace is thy chastisement.'"

We hope we have said, if not enough to do justice

to "The Shaving of Shagpat," enough to make our readers desire to see it. They will find it, compared with the other fictions which the season has provided, to use its own Oriental style, "as the apple-tree among the trees of the wood."

IV

GEORGE ELIOT

ON

THE SHAVING OF SHAGPAT

[The following short extract is taken from "Art and Belles Lettres" in *The Westminster Review* (vol. lxv., No. cxviii.), New Series, vol. ix., No. ii., pp. 625-650, April, 1856, an article which also contained among many short notices reviews of the third volume of Ruskin's "Modern Painters," Wilkie Collins's "After Dark," and Kingsley's "The Heroes," and a reference to and quotation from Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass." "The Shaving of Shagpat" passage occurs on pp. 638-639.]

WE turn from the art which most of us must leave our homes to get even a glimpse of, to that which has at least the advantage of visiting us at our own firesides—the art of the romancer and the novelist; and the first work of fiction that presents itself as worth notice is "The Shaving of Shagpat," an admirable imitation of Oriental tale-telling, which has given us far more pleasure than we remember to have had even in younger days from reading "Vathek"—the object of Byron's enthusiastic praise. Of course the great mass of fictions are imitations more or less slavish and mechanical—imitations of Scott, of Balzac, of Dickens, of Currer Bell, and the rest of the real "makers"; every great master has his school of

followers, from the kindred genius down to the feeble copyist. "The Shaving of Shagpat" is distinguished from the common run of fictions, not in being an imitation, but in the fact that its model has been chosen from no incidental prompting, from no wish to suit the popular mood, but from genuine love and mental affinity. Perhaps we ought to say that it is less an imitation of the "Arabian Nights" than a similar creation inspired by a thorough and admiring study. No doubt, if a critical lens were to be applied, there would be found plenty of indications that the writer was born in Western Europe, and in the nineteenth century, and that his Oriental imagery is got by hearsay; but to people more bent on enjoying what they read than on proving their acumen, "The Shaving of Shagpat" will be the thousand and *second* night which they perhaps longed for in their childhood. The author is alive to every element in his models; he reproduces their humour and practical sense as well as their wild imaginativeness. Shibli Bagarag, the barber, carries a great destiny within him: he is to shave Shagpat the clothier, and thus to become Master of the Event. The city of Shagpat, unlike the city of London, regards shaving, and not the beard, as the innovation; and Shagpat is a "miracle of hairiness, black with hair as he had been muzzled with it, and his head, as it were, a berry in a huge bush by reason of it," and when the countenance of Shagpat waxed fiery it was as "a flame kindled by travellers at night in a bramble bush, and he ruffled and heaved, and was as when

dense jungle-growths are stirred violently by the near approach of a wild animal." Moreover, among the myriad hairs of Shagpat is the mysterious "Identical," which somehow holds the superstition of men in bondage, so that they bow to it without knowing why—the most obstinate of all bowing, as we are aware. Hence he who will shave Shagpat, and deliver men from worshipping his hairy mightiness, will deserve to be called Master of the Event; and the story of all the adventures through which Shibli Bagarag went before he achieved this great work—the thwackings he endured, the wondrous scenes he beheld, and the dangers he braved to possess himself of the magic horse Garaveen, the Lily of the Enchanted Sea, and other indispensable things, with his hairbreadth escapes from spiteful genii—all this forms the main action of the book. Other tales are introduced, serving as pleasant landing places on the way. The best of these is the story of Khipil the Builder, a humorous apologue, which will please readers who are unable to enjoy the wilder imaginativeness of Oriental fiction; but lovers of the poetical will prefer the story of Bhanavar the Beautiful. We confess to having felt rather a languishing interest towards the end of the work; the details of the action became too complicated, and our imagination was rather wearied in following them. But where is the writer whose wing is as strong at the end of his flight as at the beginning? Even Shakespeare flags under the artificial necessities of a *dénouement*.